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ABSTRACT

A study compared 17 European countries' initial and continuing vocational training systems. Two kinds of continuing training (CT)--that which is initiated by the employer and that which is intiated by the individual--provide an indicator for comparing the different situations observed throughout the European Community. The two forms are mutually reinforcing. The more employers have recourse to CT, the greater the chances the country involved can rely on widespread practices of individually initiated training. This complementary relationship is not automatic, however. In France, the considerable investment of companies in CT is matched by a weak position with regard to individually initiated training. The dynamism of employer-initiated CT practices depends on three essential factors: impact of economic activity and company size, influence of initial vocational training, and impact of the organization of continuing vocational training. Individuals assume responsibility for their training at some point in their working life in all countries, but to different degrees. The objectives pursued are multiple, even if CT is increasingly intended to ward off unemployment. Individual initiatives also emerge in the context of lifelong learning. The following factors contribute to individual initiatives: the tradition of lifelong learning and diversification of training supply; the right to training leave in two forms: legal and contractual; government aid measures; and certification of CT. (YLB)

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Factors in the Spread of Continuing Training in the European Community

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Training & Employment

A FRENCH NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

FACTORS IN THE SPREAD OF CONTINUING TRAINING IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

The continuous process of developping and expanding knowledge through 'life-long training' constitutes an important issue for Europe. Two kinds of continuing training, alternately initiated by the employer or the individual, can provide an indicator for comparing the different situations observed throughout the European Community. The analysis of these training practices and the factors favouring their development brings out the originality of the French system, which is marked by the predominance of employer-initiated continuing vocational training. Such an analysis can thus contribute to the ongoing debate on the directions France should take in the future.

The observation of continuing training practices in the European Community brings out a large variety of situations resulting at once from the degree of organisation of continuing training in each country, the relations between such training and the educational system and the labour market and the involvement of numerous players.

The overview that follows privileges one indicator–the role of individuals and employers as the main initiators and ultimate beneficiaries of continuing training–in order to address the situations in each country, even if the often important role assumed by other players is invoked later on.[1]

In very schematic fashion, a "mapping" of the different countries is provided, with each country defined in terms of two dimensions–practices depending on employers' initiatives and those depending on the initiatives of individuals. The results obtained should be seen as a descriptive ranking of the EU members and not an absolute hierarchy.

The "mapping" in Table 1 brings out three distinct groups of countries according to the volume of employer-initiated training. A European survey (see box on methodology) gives an overview of the disparities in Europe: the percentage of chances of access to training varies from 13 percent (Greece, Portugal) to 39 percent (UK), while the training effort (number of hours per salaried employee) ranges from 6 hours (Italy) to 20 hours (France). Similarly, Table 1 illustrates the uneven use of individual initiatives in Europe depending on the role of the traditional culture of life-long training, the quality and openness of the training supply for adults and the extent of government incentives or results of collective bargaining. The two forms of initiatives studied are mutually reinforcing. The more employers have recourse to continuing training, the greater the chances that the country involved can rely on widespread practices of individually initiated training.

Table 1
Continuing Training in the European Community

Individual Initiative \ Employer Initiative	*Slight*	*Average*	*Strong*
Limited	Italy Spain Greece Portugal	Ireland	
Moderate		Germany Austria Belgium Luxembourg	**France**
Widespread		Netherlands	United Kingdom
Strong			Denmark Finland Sweden

Source: Formation professionnelle initiale et continue en Europe (March 1999).

1. The approach deals only incidentally with government policies in continuing training and notably the training programmes for the unemployed that are fairly widespread in Europe.

METHODOLOGY

The results presented in this article are drawn from a comparison of initial and continuing vocational training systems in seventeen European countries that was carried out by Céreq and its associated centres in partnership with the Elf Aquitaine group. They draw on two kinds of complementary information–an analysis of continuing training systems and practices in each country and statistical data.

The measure of employer-initiated training is based on the results of the European Community's first Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS 1). For Austria, Finland and Sweden, the sources are national and do not coincide completely with the CVTS variables for the other countries. The indicator used to evaluate the employer's initiative is the companies' training effort, which measures the number of hours of training per salaried employee and takes into account the length of training and the chances of access to training.

By contrast, the measure of employee-initiated training has not been the subject of any harmonised international survey and thus relies on a prudent use of national sources. These data are somewhat fragile in the context of an international comparison.

The volume edited by François Aventur and Martine Möbus, *Initial and Continuing Vocational Training in Europe* (1999), includes individual studies on each country and a cross-country overview.

This complementary relationship is not automatic, however, notably in France. The considerable investment of companies in continuing training is matched by a fairly moderate individual initiative. The supply of continuing vocational training (CVT) addressed directly to individuals is limited, especially since the expected benefits are fairly modest relative to the costs borne by the individual. Career advancement paths based on continuing training and its certification are not well developped, and, in addition, the tradition of life-long education and personal development is less widespread in France than in other European countries. France's singular position in the typology of European countries is a good illustration of the importance of national factors in the development of continuing training practices.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO EMPLOYER INITIATIVES IN CONTINUING TRAINING

The dynamism of employer-initiated continuing training practices depends on several factors, three of which seem to be essential.

Impact of economic activity and company size

The company's economic activity influences the intensity and content of continuing training practices. In all countries, the most training-oriented sectors have an activity characterised by high capital intensity, state-of-the-art technology and/or highly skilled labour. These include the postal and telecommunications services, banks and insurance companies and energy. Conversely, textile/clothing manufacture, construction, metal-working and metal products are amongst the least training oriented.

The size of the company also plays a role insofar as this determines the financial means that will be accorded to continuing training as well as the possibilities for capitalising on training efforts (the company's 'domestic market'). However, it does not have the same effect in all countries. To be sure, with the exception of Denmark, the larger the company, the more recourse there is to continuing training. However, the sharp break between small and large companies in France, Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal is not to be found in the countries of Northern Europe.

Influence of Initial Vocational Training

Employer-initiated continuing training practices must also be situated in the context of national forms of organising initial vocational training because these two levels work together to generate the qualifications and skills of the labour force. Their interdependence thus gives rise to a certain degree of interchangeability between the initial and continuing segments. One case corresponds to heavy company investment in continuing training as a complement to initial vocational training. This is the situation in France, where initial vocational training is developped but privileges school-based forms over apprenticeship. The same is true in Sweden, where there is no apprenticeship and employers have to initiate the individual to the specific knowledge of a company or a branch. The United Kingdom stands somewhat apart in that the recent introduction of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) tends to structure initial vocational training and apprenticeship, the first of which is traditionally limited and the second largely informal.

Germany constitutes a second case. The companies, which are heavily involved in initial training (through apprenticeship), have a more limited investment in continuing vocational training. The dynamic is similar in Austria and, to a lesser degree, in the Netherlands.

In Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, it is rather a gradual complementarity that emerges between efforts to structure initial vocational training and the emergence of organisational rules for continuing training. Denmark enjoys a singular position because employer-initiated apprenticeship and continuing training are both developped, thus reinforcing a strategy of strong complementarity between initial and continuing training.

Impact of the Organisation of Continuing Vocational Training

Several forms of regulation involving government authorities and/or labour and management are at work in different countries and contribute to the spread of employer-initiated continuing-training practices.

Table 2
Employer's Role in Initial Vocational Training and Continuing Training

Employer's Role → / In initial vocational training ↓	Continuing Training: *Weak*	*Average*	*Strong*
Little importance	Spain	Belgium	Finland Sweden
Slightly formalised	Italy Greece Portugal		United Kingdom
Minority role, institutionalised		Ireland Luxembourg Netherlands	**France**
Dominant, institutionalised		Germany Austria	Denmark

Source: Formation professionnelle initiale et continue en Europe (March 1999).

Legally required employer funding, which applies to all the companies in France, does not exist in any other country in this form and for such a long period of time. In several countries, the employer is free to decide how in-company continuing training is to be regulated. This is notably the case in the United Kingdom, but also in Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Finland, Sweden and Portugal. Between these two opposing forms of regulation, the other countries have imposed limited constraints of financing on the employers, via collective agreements (Italy, Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland) or tripartite agreements (Spain).

Government financial incentives that go directly to the companies apply to only about half of the countries, in the form of a subsidy or a tax credit. These are particularly aimed at preventing unemployment and aiding the SMEs. In France, training development commitments complement the funding of SME training plans and serve the least-skilled employees. Such practices are also found in Germany and the Netherlands, as well as the United Kingdom and Ireland. In Sweden, and especially in Denmark, government aid helps to hire and train a job seeker in order to replace a salaried employee on training leave.

Government policies intended to structure continuing training supply rarely take the form of subsidies except in the Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Finland) and the United Kingdom. In various other countries, however, public authorities are gradually providing incentives to improve the quality of training, either by promoting specific quality standards for training supply or by adopting the ISO 9000 norms (Ireland, France, Germany). Some countries also intervene to regulate training supply through vocational certificates–the NVQs in the United Kingdom, the vocational certificate register in Spain and Portugal, skills guidelines (the 1994 law on vocational qualifications in Finland) or a qualification system regulated through a tripartite mechanism in Denmark.

Only a few countries have set up specific structures to provide assistance to the company (for the definition of needs, identification of training supply, funding of training plans). In the United Kingdom, the Training and Enterprise Councils constitute a regulation tool at the local and regional level. In France, the joint authorised collection bodies (at the branch or regional level) give labour and management control over the resources collected through the required contributions provided for by law. In Spain, Portugal and Greece, specific institutions serve as a support for a joint intervention by government authorities and labour and management. In other countries where training practices are more developped, this function is ensured by the State, local communities, chambers of commerce or employers' organisations.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVES

Individuals assume responsibility for their training at some point in their working life in all countries, but to different degrees. The objectives pursued are multiple; even if continuing training is increasingly intended to ward off unemployment. Individual initiatives also emerge in the context of life-long learning.

Tradition of Life-Long Learning and Diversification of Training Supply

The Scandinavian countries have a strong tradition of life-long learning and a very diversified continuing training supply that has no equivalent elsewhere in Europe. Equal access to education, along with moral and civic development, are essential factors in these societies. Most training programmes intended for young people are also accessible to adults in conditions that favour enrollment in training programmes outside of working hours.

In Germany, Austria and Luxembourg, education for personal development (*Bildung*) is also important and often separated from professional goals, although it is true that the rise in unemployment (especially in Germany) is pushing individuals to orient their initiatives towards training programmes that improve their employability. In these countries, the training supply is also relatively open and diversified.

In both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the concern for life-long learning is also important. In the Netherlands, the objectives are both professional and 'cultural'. Government authorities are genuinely preoccupied with opening all sections of the educational system to both young people and adults. In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, individual training initiatives largely occur in a professional context.

In France, the development of public or private supplies of education for adults based on 'Republican values' seems at present to be less widespread than in the countries of Northern Europe. It has notably been confronted by the rapid growth of initial training, while the limited openness of initial training institutions to adults and their specific requirements has held back individual initiatives.

Right to Training Leave

Two-thirds of the European countries have arrangements that allow salaried employees to benefit from a leave for training purposes. The guarantees giving employees access to the training of their own initiative take two forms: legal and contractual.

Legal forms: Amongst the Scandinavian countries, Sweden guarantees the right to an unpaid leave, Finland, a leave accompanied by a government scholarship, and Denmark, the possibility of a negotiated training leave (for an average of four months, an option that is used fairly often). In France and Belgium, support for the individual initiative takes the form of a paid training leave that is established by law. But the impact of this right on the individual initiative remains limited; in France, for example, less than 0.5 percent of employees in companies with at least ten salaried employees use it. In Germany, individual rights of access depend on the legislation of each *Land*. In ten of the sixteen *Bundesländer*, the law grants all salaried employees the right to a training leave paid by the employer (on the average, 5 days a year). Portugal has recently legalised a system of authorisation for non-compensated absences for training.

Contractual forms: In the Netherlands, 40 percent of the collective agreements authorise training leaves for periods ranging from one to ten days. In Italy, a leave for 150 hours of training every three years was instituted in the metal-working industry in 1973; although it has gradually spread to most of the other branches, it is little used. In Spain, the

'individual training permit' created in 1992 at the inter-occupational level grants 150 paid hours a year to prepare for an official qualification.

Government Aid Measures

Government aid can apply either to the financing of continuing training supply oriented towards individual demands or to financial advantages accorded directly to individual projects. Subsidies for the training supply exist everywhere, but the levels vary; they are highest in the Scandinavian countries. Direct aid for individual projects is less widespread. This can take the form of funding for individual training leaves (France, Belgium) or allowances paid to individuals (Finland, Denmark). It can also consist of an income tax deduction (UK, Germany, Austria, Luxembourg) or assistance for specific publics (unskilled employees in Denmark, preparation for a supervisory certificate in Germany, a training cheque in Austria and more recently in France or a system of career development loans at preferential rates for obtaining the NVQ in the UK).

Certification of Continuing Training

Individually initiated continuing training is often distinguished by its objective: obtaining a qualification in order to improve the employee's prospects of mobility (internal and/or external). This objective is especially common in systems where the qualification enjoys wide recognition and in countries which encourage degree programmes for adults. This is the case in the Scandinavian countries and more particularly in Denmark, where vocational diplomas are highly recognised by employers. This is also true in the Netherlands, but to a lesser extent. In the Germanic countries (Germany, Austria and, to a lesser degree, Luxembourg), the existence of promotional tracks leading to intermediate jobs (technician, supervisor) that are based on titles exclusively accessible through continuing training encourages employees to enter these diploma programmes.

In France as well, certain titles are obtained specifically through continuing training at institutions such as the CNAM (National Conservatory of Arts and Engineering), AFPA (Adult Vocational Education Association) or chambers of commerce and, more recently, the vocational qualification certificates, and the diplomas of the national educational system can now be obtained through alternate channels such as the accreditation of work experience. However, these possibilities are not yet sufficiently exploited, insofar as the training supply remains less flexible than in the Scandinavian countries.

In the United Kingdom, the new system of NVQs, which involves initial and continuing training without distinction, is aimed at promoting skills certificates. Their recognition is not determined by centralised negotiations, however, and depends on agreements signed at the individual company level.

Conclusion

The various initiatives of the European Union (notably the White Paper "Teaching and Learning–Towards the Cognitive Society", or the European "Life-Long Training Year") have contributed to reviving the debate on the importance of continuing training at the European level. Great inequalities in the development of CVT in the European countries, with regard to both employer-initiated and employee-initiated training, may be observed, and the role of the different governments and their general contribution to the spread of access to continuing training invoked. The recommendations of the European Union bear in particular on the various means of improving the individual right of access. Here too, the research carried out in the different countries shows that it is counter-productive to oppose the access of individual employees on their employer's initiative to that of individuals on their own initiative. The countries that are the most advanced in the development of continuing training are those that combine these two dimensions the most often. In France, the impact of existing legislation (the Continuing Training Act of 1971) and a tradition of social dialogue on continuing training have allowed company initiatives to develop in proportions that are comparable to those of our most advanced partners in this area. On the other hand, the French position with regard to individually initiated training is relatively weak. It would thus seem clear that what is needed in the case of France is greater development of the right to individual access, as recommended in the joint diagnosis recently published by the secretary of state for continuing training. For the other members of the European Union, it is rather the field of employer-initiated training that awaits innovative incentives.

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